

Hall of Fame Inductees

Engineering Heritage Queensland

John Baille HENDERSON

MICE MASCE

1836 - 1921

INDUCTED IN 2004

John Henderson, born in London, UK, came to Australia in the early 1850s where he trained as a civil engineer on the construction of Melbourne-Geelong railway (c1857), and worked with Roads and Bridges Department. In 1863, he became the first engineer of Albion Shire in Gippsland, resigning in 1866 to work with Water Supply Department in Central Highlands where he completed the Coliban Scheme; He was District Engineer in Sandhurst (Bendigo) and Castlemaine areas.

Henderson moved to Queensland in 1878 and was appointed Resident Engineer for Northern Waterworks in the Department of Harbours and Rivers. In 1879 he was given charge of all waterworks in the Colony, and in 1881 he was appointed State Hydraulic Engineer and head of New Water Supply Department.

Initially the Department provided water supplies for drought-affected Western Queensland stock routes by digging earth tanks and shallow water bores. With discovery of artesian water in Bourke in 1879, Henderson had a successful artesian bore drilled at Barcaldine in 1887. Together with Government Geologist R. Logan Jack, he went to define the Great Artesian Basin which covers two thirds of Queensland; Their attempt to control artesian water with a Bill to Parliament in 1891 was

rejected. Incidental to the boring programme was the first hydro-electric power plant (Thargomindah bore 1896) and discovery of natural gas (Roma 1900).

Under Henderson, the Department supervised all town water supplies built with loan funds and the large provincial towns submitted project for approval, with Department designing and supervising construction of smaller schemes such as Charters Towers and Gympie.

After the heavy flooding from 1887 to 1893, Henderson installed flood gauges along the Brisbane, the Mary and the border rivers, and established the present methods of forecasting and issuing forecasts of flood heights. He prepared flood mitigation proposals for Brisbane, Gympie, and Maryborough, but it was not until 1909 that he received approval to employ hydrographers and initiate regular stream gauging.

In 1903, Henderson took over Weather Bureau until the first Commonwealth Meteorologist was appointed in 1908 and produced diagrammatic charts of rainfall. Queensland water supply and irrigation schemes are based on Henderson's work. In his working life, he was affectionally known as Hydraulic Henderson, and retired in 1916 in his eighty first year.